

cruel summer by allroadsleadhere

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Summary:

Max let out a quiet cry and circled her arms around his neck, “I-I thought—“

”I’m fine, Mad Max. Shit, I’m so glad you’re okay,” he held onto her tighter, almost as if he believed she’d disappear if he let go even for a second. She was guilty of doing the exact same thing.

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or the lumax reunion we deserved after the battle of starcourt

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Author's Note:

taking matters into my own hands because the duffer brothers hate me!

tw: brief mentions of racism, implied/referenced abuse (physical and emotional), blood

Hovering over Billy's body, Max let's out a sob, the kind of sob so heart wrenching it hurts the others surrounding to hear. She feels like she can't breathe. Can't focus on anything else besides her step-brother, who's laying in front of her, chest unmoving.

It disturbs her that this is the most still and calm she's seen him in the years she's known him. There hadn't been a day where he wasn't angry with her over something, and sometimes there were really bad days where he got pissed and broke her skateboard for the millionth time or told her she took up too much space and that everyone would grow tired of her, eventually becoming the voice she heard in her head when those same thoughts repeated over and over again. Or sometimes really bad days when he'd tell Neil about seeing her with Lucas, she doesn't like thinking about those days much.

Maybe it's because she's fourteen years old and she just witnessed someone she'd known and lived with for years die right in front of her that lead to this.

All she can smell is the blood, there's so much blood, and smoke. She doesn't even realize how badly she's shaking until a steady and warm

arm wraps around her, soon followed by another. Suddenly, the metallic scent of blood isn't all she can smell. It's El, who's the only thing keeping her grounded as she whispers reassurances into her hair.

"It's okay. Y-You're okay."

Max shifts and buries her head into El's chest, her tears leaving stains on her shirt, right next to dry blood. She thinks the exhausting events of today are finally catching up to her when she feels El leave a soft and comforting kiss on her forehead, arms still wrapped around her body. She doesn't have time to think about it much, as suddenly she's being pulled to her feet by people she doesn't know, separating her from El.

She realizes it's not a threat when she catches a glimpse of their uniforms, but it doesn't do anything to calm her worries. It hits her as the medics are finishing up checking her for injuries that amidst seeing Billy's death, she hadn't seen Lucas.

Filled with panic, her eyes shoot around the parking lot, gaining a worried glance from Robin who's sitting in the back of the truck with her, looking around for any sign of the boy. Her stomach churns as she begins to think of every possible thing that could've occurred during the battle, tears beginning to pool in her eyes once again, gripping tightly on the ice pack she's holding against her head.

Robin places a hand on Max's shoulder, "Little Red?"

Max turns to face the older girl, hoping she can't see how glassy her

eyes are. She does, of course, “Looking for somebody?”

She can’t bring herself to answer, but it doesn’t matter because Robin speaks up once again, “They’re all okay. The other ten year olds, I mean,” Max thinks that she would’ve laughed at that if she didn’t feel so drained, “Don’t w-Oh one’s walking, actually running, over here.”

Max’s head snapped forward, locking eyes with Lucas. She quickly set down her ice pack and threw the blanket off her shoulders. In quick strides, she was eventually a few feet away from Lucas. She let out a content sigh as she saw him quicken his pace to close the remaining distance between them before he wrapped his arms around her waist. Max let out a quiet cry and circled her arms around his neck, “I-I thought—“

”I’m fine, Mad Max. Shit, I’m so glad you’re okay,” he held onto her tighter, almost as if he believed she’d disappear if he let go even for a second. She was guilty of doing the exact same thing.

A relieved sob escapes Lucas’s mouth as he leans back to gaze at her, taking in every inch of her face. Max unwraps her arms from around his neck and goes to place her hands on top of his, still holding onto her waist.

It’s always been a thing for them—the hand holding. Even without even realizing it, as if it’s second nature, she’ll find herself reaching towards him and he’s always reaching back. It always feels reassuring and grounding, it reminds her that they’re okay, that they’re safe.

So it makes confusion etch across her face when she doesn’t feel the

usual comforting touch, “Your hands.”

Lucas’s brows furrow, “What?”

Max removes his hands from her waist, placing them between them and up close for them both to inspect. Realization seems to dawn on Lucas, as does embarrassment, “Shit, yeah, I kinda burned them with one of those fireworks.”

She shakes her head and gently tugs on him , “Come on, stupid.”

It’s her way of trying to hide how concerned she really is, and if he sees through it, which he does, he doesn’t comment on it and let’s her silently guide him in the direction of a medic.

Much later, once Lucas’s hand is wrapped, Max finds herself in the same place she was earlier, on the back of a truck with Robin beside her (who had offered her a new ice pack when she returned). Only this time, Lucas is standing beside her, a blanket wrapped around his shoulders.

He heard her cries as he and the others stared in shock at the dead body, his entire body ached not being able to reach out to her. He wants to tell her he’s all ears, that if she needs to talk he’s there. He knows how terrified she was of Billy, how deep her hatred of him ran. He knows before she does that those cries were of relief.

(Lucas wouldn’t say it out loud, not right now at least, but he knows

the feeling all too well. His mind flashes to being shoved into a cupboard and rough hands holding onto him, yelling threats into his face, nothing but pure hatred in his eyes. It's much later on, after they've been torn apart and found their way back to each other, when they both sit down and really talk about everything.)

When it hits her, the guilt that follows feels overwhelming. But she can't help the relief spreading through her body.

Relief that she wouldn't have to lock her room when she and Billy stayed home alone. Relief that she wouldn't have to get rides from him anymore, that she wouldn't have to see him smirk as he drove faster just to see the terrified look on her face. Relief that he would never get his hands on Lucas again.

It makes her feel like an awful person, being relieved that he's gone, (*What kind of monster feels content when someone dies?*) but she doesn't want to think about that right now. Not when Lucas is staring at her full of understanding. Not when he smiles at her after she scoots over a bit to let him sit beside her. He notices that she's stiff and making a point to lean away, trying to not accidentally hurt his hand, and rolls his eyes, "Come on, stupid."

Max huffs before letting him tug her into his side, leaning her head on his shoulder. They end up squished and she's constantly making sure that she's not causing any discomfort to his injury, but it's okay. They're okay for now.

It won't be until months later, after El and Will move away, when the guilt and feeling of not deserving Lucas returns and then she's pushing him away and he's clinging on until she's withdrawn completely. He wonders if maybe he wasn't enough as she thinks that

she wasn't.

Author's Note:

comments and critiques are very encouraged!